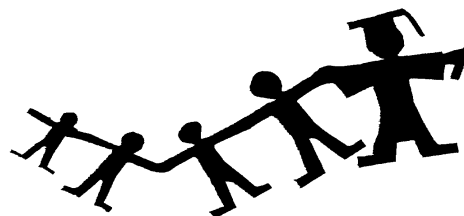


# Linkages to Learning News

## Montgomery County, Maryland



Linkages to Learning is a Collaborative School-based Partnership among the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public Schools, Public and Private Agencies, Families and Communities. **Quarterly Newsletter, Spring 2001**

### VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, one hundred and twenty seven of Linkages to Learning's volunteers and community partners were cheered at Harmony Hills Elementary School for helping to meet the needs of children and families served by Linkages. All supporters received *Certificates of Appreciation* and will have a book donated in their honor to a child attending the Linkages to the Library program this summer. At the event, the first *Linkages Partnership Awards* were presented to recognize outstanding contributions of individuals, community and business partners. Recipients of the 2001 *Linkages Partnership Awards*:

#### Individual Volunteers:

**Russell Acosta, Elaine Hruska and Mary Ranade**, long-time volunteer teachers for Linkages' parents enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages classes, serving the Harmony Hills Elementary and Parkland Middle School communities.



Adult ESOL students from Harmony Hills and Parkland with their tutors, Vanessa Morales, site coordinator at Parkland, and Saralee Todd.

#### Business Partner:

**COMCAST**, for serving as a major sponsor of the Linkages to the Library initiative, supporting children's development of literacy skills and familiarizing many immigrant families with the Montgomery County Public Libraries.



Saralee Todd with Yvonne Dodd, Highland site coordinator and Lisa Mazer from COMCAST.

#### Community Partner:

**Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church**, for sponsoring multiple initiatives at Greencastle Elementary and Banneker Middle Schools, including a coat and winter clothing drive, an "Angel Tree" holiday gift-giving program and the "Fairy-godmother Club" for children's birthdays, and for funding camp scholarships, Spanish literacy classes and student support groups.



Janet Roth, of the Commonwealth Foundation and Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, joins with BHPC's Phyllis Rumbarger and Elizabeth St. John, Saralee Todd and Ila Roy, director of AMIGO.

Saralee Todd, Special Assistant to County Executive, Douglas M. Duncan, praised attendees for "rising to meet the needs of families and kids, bringing with them their ideas, talent, energy and resources." According to Robin Weaver, principal at Harmony Hills, "Volunteer partners play a key role in meeting the needs of children and families. From teaching adults English as a second language and supporting health fairs, to donating food, toys, clothing, books, bikes, furniture, computers and camp scholarships."

Guests at the event honoring volunteers and community partners included Maryland Delegates Hank Heller and Carol Petzold, Walter Lange of the Board of Education, and County Councilmembers Michael Subin and Steve Silverman, and numerous partners from MCPS, private agencies and county government. Councilmember Subin, summed it up well, noting that "at Linkages to Learning, prevention is everybody's business, with volunteers and community partners maximizing services and resources where they're needed most."

Linkages staff members enjoy the delicious food, and festivities. Thanks to **Ay Caramba, Party Cloths** and **Capital Rentals** for supporting the volunteer event.



## COMMUNITY MINISTRIES SALUTES LINKAGES MOM

Matilde Hernandez has achieved what we hope each Linkages client will accomplish. Assisted by Linkages, she successfully navigated the difficult road from homelessness to self-sufficiency. When Vanessa Morales, former case manager at Harmony Hills E.S., learned about Community Ministry of Montgomery County's (CMMC) *Community Recognition Award*, she immediately thought of Ms. Hernandez. CMMC established the award to acknowledge the achievements of low-income residents to become self-sufficient, and to encourage low-income residents to pursue their educational goals.

Vanessa began working with Ms. Hernandez when she and her two children found themselves with no place to live. Vanessa encouraged her to continue looking for work while also volunteering at the school. Throughout the difficult time that the family lived in a shelter, Ms. Hernandez' children never missed school. Eventually, she found an apartment and began to work for MCPS as a substitute teacher.

Vanessa shared the success of Ms. Hernandez with CCMC through its nomination process, and on May 2, 2001, at the CMMC annual Congregational Caregivers Conference, Matilde Hernandez was awarded the **2001 Community Recognition Award**. In addition to the Certificate of Recognition, she received a \$1,000 educational scholarship, a \$200 gift certificate from Hecht's and a "day of beauty" from a local day spa and salon. Congratulations to Matilde Hernandez and her children for achieving so much. And, hats off to Vanessa Morales for recognizing the potential of all the people she serves, and for encouraging and empowering them along the way.

## A GOOD STORY

### Chapter One: What A Guy!

Jack Wicker, former Parkland Middle School teacher and now a teacher at Edison High School, went way beyond our wildest dreams when he agreed to build a storage closet for Linkages at Parkland. Not only did he donate his time, but he also found donated building materials. This very large storage room has shelves for food and clothing, lighting, and even a door with a lock!

### Chapter Two: A Great Collection of Food!

Vanessa Morales, site coordinator at Parkland, connected with Beth Schroeder, teacher at Hoover Middle School, who organized a massive food drive among Hoover students. The Hoover students collected over 4,000 food items (cans of soup, tuna, juices and boxes of cereal, pasta and rice). Now, the new storage closet looks more like a "mini-mart" and the Linkages staff is prepared to assist families in crisis who need emergency food supplies.

## CHILLING WITH THE WASHINGTON CHIEFS

Yvonne Dodd, site coordinator at Highland Elementary School, received a call from a Highland parent who told her that her employer had dozens of brand new refrigerators to give away. Yvonne knew she could find families who needed these refrigerators, but the hard part was finding someone to pick-up and deliver. So, she contacted the Volunteer Center and they suggested calling the Washington Chiefs Youth Service Organization. The Washington Chiefs, a minor league football team, have formed this non-profit to offer prevention programming for at-risk youth. They also have a truck and strong men who agreed to pickup and deliver 25 refrigerators to needy families. Linkages staff from Broad Acres, New Hampshire Estates and Highland identified interested families and the Chiefs did the rest!

*Note: The Chiefs' play June 23 through July 28. Games are played at 5pm on Saturday at Blair High School in Silver Spring. Tickets are sold at the gate and children are admitted free. Proceeds support the "No Thugs, No Drugs" program.*

## AREA SCHOOL DISTRICTS VISIT LINKAGES

This spring, school officials from public school districts in Arlington County, Virginia and Frederick County, Maryland came to visit three of our sites and learn about our services. The counties sent delegations with representatives from their Board of Education, superintendent's office, Health Department, and pupil services. They were very interested in finding out how Linkages operates in terms of service delivery, collaboration and administration, how it's funded, and how its outcomes are measured.

Representatives from Frederick visited Linkages to Learning at Harmony Hills' School-Based Health Center and Parkland Middle School, and the Arlington group visited Linkages at Highland Elementary. Thanks to our colleagues and the leadership of MCPS, the Department of Health and Human Services and private, non-profit providers, who joined together to share information and support the expansion of school-based services throughout the Washington metropolitan area.

## THE COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Linkages to Learning has been asked to join as a partner and serve as a "best practices" site for the Coalition for Community Schools (CCS). CCS is a national organization working toward improving education and helping students learn and grow while supporting and strengthening their families and communities. Community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Martin J. Blank, of *the Institute for Educational Leadership* and staff director of the Coalition, became acquainted with Linkages to Learning at CCS conference at which Linkages conducted a workshop.

## ON THE HEALTH FRONT

On Sunday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, a Health Fair was held for over 300 children and families of the Broad Acres school community. The fair, coordinated by Ladys Lux, Broad Acres' School

Community Health Nurse, stressed the importance of good nutrition and exercise. Thanks to the generous assistance of Maryland Physicians Care, healthy snacks were provided, and a moon bounce was provided for the enjoyment of youngsters from the school and neighborhood.

As part of their "Mitzvah Day" for community service, members of Washington Hebrew Congregation set up and monitored the moon bounce, obstacle course, relay races and soccer activities.

Other partners who helped make the day fun, informative and successful included: staff from MCPS' ESOL office; Katherine Marquette, D.C. United, and two of the team's soccer players; William Delaney, Community Safety Education, Fire and Rescue Services; Mercedes Moore, Smoking Prevention and Cessation, DHHS' Health Promotion Services; Kathy Wood, Bike Helmets, DHHS and Safe Kids Coalition; Linda Warren, DHHS' Accountability and Customer Services; Lourdes Sanchez, DHHS' Cancer Control for Women; Joy F. Dana, (a parent from Broad Acres) Baby Massage; Thi Bui, Nutrition info, University of Maryland; the Hillandale Fire Department and the Montgomery County Child Passenger Safety Initiative. Congratulations to Ladys and the Broad Acres team for taking the extra time to orchestrate this exciting and educational event!

## SEWING GROUP COMES FULL CIRCLE

When businesswoman Joye Newman was seeking seamstresses to create handmade challah covers (to cover the Sabbath bread in Jewish homes), Ilene Sparber inquired whether any of the site coordinators had clients who might be interested. At Highland Elementary School, a group of fifteen women responded, eager to learn a new skill and earn some additional money. Under the direction of intern Liliana Peña, the group of stay-at-home mothers met regularly and found a way to improve their financial situation, increasing their self-confidence in the process.

Now the group has begun a new stage of development, with the women learning many skills essential in operating a small business: how to organize and plan their work, how to bill customers and how to track resources for the product they are developing. In a few months, the final phase of the project will occur as Liliana steps away from her role as trainer and mediator, and the microbusiness is turned over to the group and its business partner for further development.

## SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS



### Broad Acres Elementary School

Spring has brought a lot of change to the Linkages to Learning program at Broad Acres. CPC Health Inc., an original partner since the founding of the Linkages to Learning center at Broad Acres, has closed due to bankruptcy. The mental health and social services team has transferred to Silver Spring YMCA Youth Services and there was no disruption in services to families. We are particularly pleased that we will continue to have psychiatric services available to families at the center.

We have received a grant through the After School Activities Program (ASAP), funded by the State through MCPS and the

Collaboration Council through August of 2002 to pilot our home-learning center project. Over the next several months we will train and support thirty families in using the computer as a gateway to self-learning at home. In addition, a pilot group of ten parents and students will receive the technical training necessary to rebuild and maintain the thirty computers that will be placed in the homes. MCPS is providing us with the used computers for the project. This pilot project is especially exciting because it fills a gap in our computer training between our computer basics course and our advanced networking computer course. It will also strengthen the integration between the job readiness programs and the acculturation programs.

Ladys Lux, SCHN, has been selected to serve on the *Governor's Advisory Council on ADHD*. This committee addresses interventions to improve outcomes for students with attentional problems.



### Eastern Middle School

On May 4, Linkages at Eastern hosted a Mother's Day Celebration. It was a busy and rewarding day. Sixty-three mothers and their families attended and they brought food from their native countries -- tamales, ugali, beef and kale, empanadas de pollo, ensalada de papa, pupusas, cakes, and desserts. The families socialized and enjoyed Latin music. Each mother received a red carnation, and a small poster designed by Linkages.

Linkages at Eastern welcomes Doris Elenes-Sancho, mental health counselor, formerly with Linkages at Broad Acres. and with Linkages at Gaithersburg MS, and a community service aide, Agnes Kariuki, who is expanding her work with Silver Spring YMCA Youth Services (SSYS). Thanks to Ana Lilia Solis and Kim Holman, SSYS for providing mental health services at Linkages until Doris' arrival.

Eastern Middle School is going to be closed at the end of the school year for major renovations. Linkages staff will use community space. Locations being considered include: New Hampshire Estates Elementary, Oakview Elementary, Christ Congregational Church and Montgomery Blair High School.



### Gaithersburg Middle School

Staff at GMS is focusing its energy working with families and students. GMS is planning a parenting workshop at the end of May and will have an outdoor therapeutic recreation group one day a week this summer.



### Greencastle Elementary & Benjamin Banneker Middle Schools

The staff has been very busy this quarter. The team has hosted monthly parenting workshops on a variety of topics, including: *Handling the Stressors of Being a Parent* and *Warning Signs of Potentially Violent Behavior*. Susan Shewchuk, mental health counselor, joined with Robert Roth from Montgomery General Hospital Adolescent Program to present an interactive family communications seminar, "Teens' and Parents' Night Out" at Banneker Middle School in March. Voices VS. Violence, a program of the Mental Health Association, presented a Parent Participation and Involvement event in April.



Nicki Sanders and Maria Martinez have joined with Vicky Strella of Project Family Outreach to offer a six-session Single Parent Support Group. The students who have been participating in the weekly *"Teen Talk"* therapy groups at Banneker Middle School took a very enjoyable and educational field trip to The Challenger Learning Center of Greater Washington. The group went on a simulated *"Mission to Mars"* in an effort to promote teamwork, problem-solving, and decision-making. A transition group for eighth graders began at Banneker in April. Susan Shewchuk designed this group to give students the opportunity to express concerns and discuss issues relevant to high-schoolers.

Laila El-Asmar, MSW intern, has concluded *Lunch Meet*, a rotating weekly lunch session with Greencastle Elementary School students in grades two through five. Laila has picked up a bi-weekly boys-only Lunch Bunch to tackle *How to Deal with Anger in a Positive and Appropriate Manner*. During alternating weeks, Laila hosts a *Leadership Lunch group* for girls entering the fifth grade next year.



### Harmony Hills Elementary School

Things are hopping at Harmony Hills! Adult English classes began again in February after the winter break. As our after-school tutoring program continues to grow, we are looking forward to strengthening our volunteer family.

In February, LTL hosted *"Strengthening the Black/African American Family"* in honor of Black History Month. In March, LTL focused on offering information about the new immigration laws as well as tax assistance.

In April, we teamed up with Voices VS. Violence to offer a wonderful bilingual program for parents of elementary school-aged children on red flags of violent behavior and how to deal with stress. While the parents enjoyed the presentation, the children participated in their own safety program.



### Highland Elementary School

As some may know, Linkages often works with abusive family situations and much of our work centers upon domestic violence. We are proud of the women in Highland's *Latina Women's Support Group*. Women in this group have significantly improved the safety and quality of their lives and their children's through the support the group and by using local resources and services. To celebrate their progress, we will be sponsoring a retreat for our members in May at the Rising Phoenix Retreat Center.

Highland continues to offer seven daytime ESOL classes, five ESOL classes at night, two women's support groups, a parenting class, and two children's social skills groups. Upcoming events include: *Linkages to the Library* this summer, *Concert Night* in July, *National Night Out* at Wheaton Presbyterian Church on August 7, and the *Latino Heritage Festival/Health & Safety Fair* at Wheaton Plaza on September 30<sup>th</sup>.

Highland Linkages staff has put together a musical group and performed songs such as "La Bamba" and "Ojos Azules" at the

Linkages to Learning Holiday party in January. We named the group the "Highlanders" and hope to continue playing for any special events in the future. Thanks again to our wonderful social work interns: Liliana Peña and Melissa Buchheister, who are completing their year at Highland. We are going to miss you!



### Kennedy Cluster Schools

The Kennedy Cluster Linkages team is at full staff! Merlina and Susan welcomed Karen McNally to the team on March 5th. Karen is the new case manager and site coordinator for the cluster. Already she has made a big difference to the families in the community.

She is working to make connections with each of the schools we serve, and is currently enrolling many children from Linkages families in summer camp programs.

Merlina finished a group at Glenallan Elementary School, and Susan wrapped up a group at Lee Middle School. They began a 6th grade girls group at Argyle Middle school shortly before spring break. They are beginning to work on planning for summer groups in the cluster. Referrals continue to come pouring into the office. The entire team is working hard to serve the many needs of the cluster.



### New Hampshire Estates & Oakview Elementary Schools

We continue to field referrals of families with multiple needs. Our team is working hard to provide the many services and help these families require. Though we were sad to see Angelica Regalado leave the family service aide position, we are delighted to welcome Thanh Nguyen. Thanh's language skills and cultural knowledge will help the team serve its schools' Vietnamese families.

Our Linkages staff is working in close cooperation with school staff to begin Spanish classes for parents that are not literate in their native language. And thanks to the joint efforts of the Child Center and Adult Services AMIGO program and the Silver Spring YMCA Youth Services, the After School Activities Program (ASAP) began April 19th. ASAP, funded by the State through MCPS and the Collaboration Council through August of 2002, provides students with after-school tutoring, volleyball classes, girl/boy scouts, and Tae Kwon Do classes through its partnership with the Maryland Vietnamese Mutual Association. In the future, other community groups will provide additional activities.



### Parkland Middle School

February, March, and April have been very busy months at the LTL site at Parkland Middle School. We have a lot to celebrate! First, we were awarded \$30,000 from the *"Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap"* Community Grant from MCPS. Vanessa Morales, site coordinator, applied for this grant in conjunction with the school administration back in October 2000 and they were all thrilled to be recipients. As a part of this grant, Linkages is offering programming for Parkland parents, beginning with a six week series of *Parenting Classes*, in

English and Spanish, focusing on adolescence. The classes have been very successful with a weekly attendance of thirty, regularly attending parents. Thanks to Jeanie Da Silva, Vicky Strella and the rest of the staff from Project Family Outreach for serving as facilitators. Another programming success funded through the grant has been *Adult Computer Classes*. We hired a bilingual computer teacher, Roberto Madoo, who started the ten-week program on April 26. The first ten-week class is for Spanish-speaking parents. The series will then be repeated for our English-speaking parents.

In the beginning of May, we began a new after-school substance abuse awareness/prevention program with Second Genesis. This also is funded through our grant and has the capacity for sixty students. We are still running the “RAP” (*Respect at Parkland*) group, using ASSETS curriculum facilitated by Robin Brandon of Voices VS. Violence.

Linkages at Parkland offered Citizenship Classes for parents during six Saturdays in March and April. We would like to thank the American Association of University Women volunteers that taught this class. Parents really enjoyed the classes and we are happy to report that one of our parents has already passed his citizenship test. We also had a family workshop, “*Youth and Gang Violence*,” in March sponsored by Voices VS. Violence. We will hold the final session of our violence prevention workshops in May, “*Keeping Families Strong*.”

Thanks to Hoover Middle School students and staff for their generous food donation that gave us a great start to fill our new food pantry. We especially thank Beth Schroeder for organizing the project. Clara Rodriguez, our case manager, has been very busy with families seeking assistance for social services needs. Common requests are for assistance with employment, immigration, food, and adult education. Sarah Burrows, mental health counselor, has been leading three student therapy groups this semester. With the co-facilitation of Suzanne Frederick of CPC Health’s PFO, she finished a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder group with West African students and has started a much needed Anger Management Group. Sarah is also running a Grief and Loss group.

A warm welcome to Marisela Moreno, Parkland parent, who has joined our site as the coordinator for the MCPS Closing the Gap grant. She will help us organize and evaluate our programming, and we are thrilled to have her on our team.



## Seneca Valley Cluster

The Linkages to Learning program in the Seneca Valley Cluster has been thriving with various activities. Groups at the middle school level included anger management, stress management, conflict resolution, and grief and loss. Additionally, students at both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Roberto Clemente middle schools have had the opportunity to participate in Therapeutic Recreation groups led by Dirk Schenck. Activities included rappelling, skiing, ice-skating, canoeing, horseback riding, and hiking. At the elementary level, a girls’ and a boys’ friendship group, a fifth grade self-esteem group, and four social skills group from grades first through fourth were maintained.

Outside of counseling and case management services, the Linkages to Learning coordinator at Roberto Clemente helped

with the development and implementation of a mentoring and tutoring program. An advice column for parents continues in Roberto Clemente’s monthly school newsletter. Topics include anger management, parenting skills, and television violence. At Martin Luther King, Jr. a workshop on bullying was offered for 12 staff members, and then later presented at a full faculty meeting in April. Sarah Greenstreet, an intern from Guide Youth Services, helped counsel students individually and co-led a social skills group at Martin Luther King, Jr.

As the spring semester ends, the Seneca Valley Linkages team has begun preparing for five summer transition groups, targeting incoming sixth graders at both middle schools and students entering ninth grade at Seneca Valley High School.



## Summit Hall Elementary School

Linkages to Learning at Summit Hall welcomes a new Case Manager/Site Coordinator, Ana Lugo Schmitz. Ana has been working with DHHS for almost seven years and she comes to Linkages to Learning with four years experience in case management services. She holds a Bachelors degree in social work from her native country, Columbia, and a Masters degree in counseling from Johns Hopkins University.

Staff at Summit Hall worked hard during the transition period between Luis Martinez’ departure and Ana’s arrival. Our appreciation to Kathy Wilcox Moore, community service aide, and Regina Morales, mental health counselor, for keeping the program afloat. A very special thanks to Olivia Aybar-Torres (on loan from Highland) for her outstanding support while filling in as case manager from January through April.

Speaking of Olivia, under her leadership and with the support of Regina Morales, a Hispanic women’s support group was initiated in February this year. It has been well attended with an average of 12 women per session. The participants meet every Thursday morning to enjoy breakfast together and to benefit from scheduled psychosocial and educational activities.

We are very excited about a new community partnership we have established with a local church, Church of the Ascension in Gaithersburg. The church will provide us with an emergency fund to help our families meet urgent needs (paying for electrical bills, shoes, medications, etc.). The church will also sponsor a summer school supply and backpack drive and a fall outerwear drive. We also hope to partner in offering nutrition education seminars. Sandy Boynton our social work intern, who is a member of the church, initiated the program and will continue to be the liaison after her internship ends in May.



## Viers Mill Elementary School

Viers Mill LTL is “up and running” and receiving referrals! We are also pleased to be teaming up with the folks at Harmony Hills and Parkland to offer programs, such as English classes and parent education, to families from all three schools. We’re helping to register children for summer camps and playgrounds

and hoping to offer some family events as well. More exciting updates to come in the future!

**Linkages to Learning News**

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401 Fleet Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor,  
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For alternative formats, call 240.777.1731 (voice),  
240.777.1245 (TTY) or 240.777.1111 (fax)

For more information, contact:  
Sharon Strauss, editor, 240.777.1449





**Linkages to Learning**  
**401 Fleet Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor**  
**Rockville, Maryland 20850**

*In this issue: Highlights of  
LTL Partnership Awards*